

2 Corinthians 11 (Part 2): 16-33 - Identifying with Christ

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2 Corinthians chapter 11. We covered the first 15 verses of this chapter last time, and so let's go ahead and read here.

Starting in verse 16 and following it says, *“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. ¹⁷ What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. ¹⁸ Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. ¹⁹ For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! ²⁰ For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. ²¹ To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!*

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.” (ESV) I'll have you stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, fill us, fill our hearts, teach us today. Minister Your Word and speak to us. For we ask it in Jesus name, amen.

Before we get into what Paul is saying here, the what of his argument related to this, I want to just talk to you a minute about his method, because there's a method to his madness. He calls it madness, but there's a method to it. And it's a way of addressing people when they say something that's outlandish or even if it's not outlandish, if it's just flat out wrong or whatever.

There's different ways that you can respond to somebody when they say something to you that they think is wrong, or you think is wrong, rather. You can say, that's wrong, and you can contradict what they're saying, and that's certainly a method. It can tend to polarize people a little bit, and it can tend to make them defensive.

What Paul is doing is he's using a method of argument, debate if you will, where he's deciding to go along with what they're thinking. And what they've been doing, is they've been listening to these Jewish religious legalists who made their way into the Corinthian church, who were boasting about themselves using very worldly and very carnal criteria.

And basically, instead of saying, those guys are idiots and you shouldn't listen to a single word they say. I mean, he's already called them false apostles and stuff like that in the last verses we read. But instead of doing that, what Paul is saying is, alright, you want to boast, let's boast. Have you ever done that with somebody?

Let me give you a quick example. If somebody was, if I'm having a discussion with someone and we have a difference of opinion related to some aspect of theology or whatever, I could just come out and say to them, okay, that's wrong and here's what's right. Or I could say to them, all right, let's assume that what you're saying is true, and then talk to them on that level. And then bring them to a place through the conversation of actually investigating the implications of their belief, so that they might realize what they're believing is untenable and insupportable. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Jesus actually used this method, believe it or not. You remember when He was confronted by a young man? We're told in the Bible, he was a rich young ruler. And this man believed very much that you could be saved by keeping the law. He believed that he could be good enough and that the law was the means that we were to keep our works in play so that one day when we die, we would be ushered into heaven based on our good works. He really believed that and Jesus knew he believed that. This young guy comes to Him and says, Master, what must I do to have eternal life? Well, that question right there tells you where the guy's at, right? Well, Jesus knew that. He could have contradicted him and said,

dude, you are just you're asking the wrong questions. But He didn't do that. He just started talking to him about the law. He just started talking to him on the level that he wanted to talk about, and eventually, by the end of the conversation brought this young man to realize that he didn't keep the law, couldn't keep the law, and that's why the man walked away very sad.

So this method is something that's used in the Bible in some places. Make no mistake about it. Even though Paul is going to boast because he's being led to it, he considers it a very fleshly thing to do. In fact, let me put this, you remember this, we looked at this verse. He said,

2 Corinthians 11:18 (ESV)

Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.

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You can tell right now where Paul believes boasting comes from. It comes from the carnality of our flesh. Okay. Why is he doing it? What's his point? What's he eventually want to bring them to understand? Well, that's mentioned later on in this passage, which I'll put again on the screen here.

2 Corinthian 11:30 (ESV)

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

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Now, that's a whole different message, and we'll touch on it today. But that's where he's going in the next chapter. Chapter 12. Which, honestly, is one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible, and I'm excited about teaching it. We'll get into that later.

And that is where Paul wants to take this argument. By using this method, you see, of saying, alright, you believe in boasting? You think boasting is cool? Alright, let's boast. We'll do a little boasting. Well, where he wants to go is, he wants them to realize that boasting is stupid. And that if we're going to boast, the only thing we really can boast in, are those things which show our weakness so that, as he'll say later, God's power might rest on us and so forth.

We'll get into that. But for right now, we want to see how Paul is using this method to bring them to the right conclusions. Look in verse 16 again. He says,

“I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little (bit).”

And he makes it very clear in verse 17. Hey, listen, what I'm about to do, this is not the way the Lord would have me talk. This is where you're forcing me to talk because you guys are so tuned in on boasting, carnal, fleshly boasting, fine, alright. Let's do a little boasting here.

Notice in verse 19, he says, *“...you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!”* That's a little godly sarcasm there. He says, *“For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, ...”* Somebody comes along and wants to enslave you, you're like, yeah, sure, come on.

He says, *“or (if they) devour[s] you, or takes advantage of you, or (they) put[s] on airs, ...”* We don't use that term, that sounds like something you'd see in a movie like *Pride and Prejudice*. *“...or (if they) strikes you in the face.”* He says you put up with it.

Do you see how Paul thinks of these Jewish legalists? He thinks of them like scammers. He's like, these people just want to cheat you like scammers. Like the spam that you get in your inbox, all they want to do is take your money, but you seem to accept it.

He says, *“To my shame, (in verse 21) I must say, we were too weak for that!”* And then he unloads, beginning in verse 22. I like this. He says, he reminds him in verse 21 first, *“I'm speaking as a fool here,”* alright? Here we go.

“Are they Hebrews? (yep) So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.” What is Paul addressing here?

First thing he's talking about is one of the boasts that these guys made was the fact that they were Jews. And the fact is, they believed, and again, very fleshly claim, they believed in the superiority of their race. Simple as that. They believed that because they were Jews, and because of their Jewish-ness, that they had special favor with God that the other people didn't have.

And these religious legalists that made their way into the church at Corinth were basically saying to the people, you guys are Gentiles, alright? We're Jews. We are the ones to whom the law was given. We are the ones to whom the promises were made. You guys are Gentiles, just sit back and listen. We'll convey some wisdom to you, because we are the ones who have it.

Had these guys really been walking with the Lord, they probably would have even heard the apostle Paul teach on that particular topic, because he did. He wrote about it even. He wrote about it to the churches in Galatia. Let me put this on the screen for you. He writes to them and says,

Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, (those things don't even count in the kingdom of God. He says,) for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And the key words there are obviously, “*in Christ Jesus.*” And what Paul is saying here, is that when we come to Christ, all of the other barriers that mean something in the world fall away. Whether they are barriers of ethnicity, whether they are barriers of class, which is slave or free, or whether they are barriers of gender. By the way, when Paul says “*there is no male or female,*” he's not saying there is no gender, that's confusion for today. He's saying, those things don't matter as far as receiving favor from God.

In other words, men have no more favor with God than do women, and vice versa. Rich people have no more favor with God than do poor, that's class. Jews have no more favor with God than do Gentiles, that's ethnicity. The point of all this is that Jesus is the great equalizer, which removes all boasting, right?

These guys were boasting in their ethnicity. We're Jews, we are sons of Abraham. They probably sang that song, Father Abraham had many sons. Remember that? Many sons had Father Abraham and I'm one of them and you're not so I'll just praise the Lord. I remember learning that when I was a kid. It didn't go quite like that, but that's how they... It just takes out all boasting. He goes on.

Verse 23, look in your Bible. “*Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one* (and he says,)—*I am talking like a madman...*” And this is where Paul now begins to lead them into understanding where real boasting lies. Where real, what's really legit, what's really important.

It has nothing to do with ethnicity or class or gender. It has to do with identification. Because identification, and we'll talk about this, identification is something Paul wore as a badge of honor. Look what he goes on to say. He

says, I've had *“far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, (to the point he says)...often (being) near death.”*

You can see from this, can't you, that what Paul believed the marks of a genuine apostle and believer in Christ frankly were all about, was how he identified with Christ in suffering. And so he enumerates on those things.

Look at verse 24. *“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.”* If you're good at math, I'm not. I checked this out on my calculator. That comes to, up to the point of writing this letter, 195 lashes with a Jewish whip. 195, Paul had endured up to this point.

Can I just tell you that some people didn't survive that? Even 39 lashes? Some people would bleed to death if that whip just got a little too deep. Or, secondary infections were a serious matter back in those days. Some people didn't survive. Paul went through it 5 times, just up to the point of this writing.

Can I ask you a question? What do you suppose his back looked like? Or the back of his legs, which they also whipped. They would do your back and then the back of your legs. Very tender spot, by the way. And they knew what they were doing, and I don't have to go into the graphic detail of how they made their whips more effective. You probably know that.

If you had been whipped that way, and you had those scars, which today would probably be easily seen because we, in the hot weather, we wear shorts, tank tops, whatever, and people saw those scars on you, and they said, wow, what is that? What would you call your scars?

I asked that question for a very specific reason, because you see, Paul actually had a name for his scars. And once again, he talked about it when he wrote to the churches in Galatia. Let me show you this. He said,

Galatians 6:17 (ESV)

For now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

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Paul called his scars, *“the marks of Jesus.”* Now, it doesn't mean Jesus put them there in the sense that, I mean, Paul saw the face, I'm sure, of the individual,

every individual who took that whip and scourged him. And he knew that wasn't Jesus and he knew that it wasn't the heart of Jesus that He would even have that happen. And yet he referred to them as, "*the marks of Jesus.*"

Here's why. It's interesting when you look up this word, marks, in the Greek It literally refers to a brand, like you would brand an animal, to show ownership. Cause..., and we still do that today, where there's open ranges. Branding an animal, whether it's a steer, or whatever type of animal it might be.

Paul is literally saying here, I bear on my body the brand of Jesus Christ, which shows His ownership of my life. That's what he's saying. And what that tells you and I is that Paul wore those scars as a badge of honor. He was honored to be able to suffer with Christ, because for him it served to demonstrate the authenticity of the lordship that he had given over to Jesus Christ.

Listen, people don't put up with this kind of garbage for no reason, right? I mean, there comes a time. I mean, if I was perpetuating a lie, or if I wasn't genuine in my walk with the Lord, they would only have to bring me to the place of my first scourging, where I would say, okay, alright, let's talk. You know what I'm saying?

If there's a genuineness, though, to who I am in Christ and the reality of what is mine to have because of my connection with Christ, then a scourging, it's like scourge away. My fifth one, can you imagine walking before your fifth scourging? And coming to that place of having your arms bound around a pole and that's what they would do. There's a ring on this pole and they would bind your hand to this thing so your arms are up and out of the way and just start whipping you. Can you imagine approaching your fifth time?

I can't, to be completely honest with you, and yet Paul went through that, and that was his badge. He called them marks of Jesus because he's like, here's these guys, here's these guys boasting to you about things that only matter in the world. Ethnicity, sure, it matters in the world. Yeah, I get it. Back in that culture, gender mattered way more than it does today. And class also mattered in that world and it still matters today. You go to a place like India, good grief, you're right here in the United States of America. But there are other places like India where it really is seen. This caste system of class, and you're the lower class, and here's the upper class and so on and so forth. Those things matter in the world, but they don't matter in the kingdom of God.

Paul is saying, let me tell you about what matters in the kingdom of God. It's devotion to Jesus Christ. It's lordship. How do you prove your lordship? How

do you prove that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life? Let nobody bother me about these things because I bear on my body the authenticity of my decision to follow Jesus Christ and my devotion to make Him Lord of my life.

That's what he's saying. You want to boast? We'll boast. Okay? You want to talk about what really matters? We'll talk about what really matters. He goes on.

Verse 25. He's not done. *"Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned."* And by the way, that was the Jewish form of execution. And they knew how to throw stones and kill people. And he says it happened once, that's enough.

I mean, we actually read about this. This happened to Paul when he went to the city of Lystra. And he was actually doing pretty good in Lystra, but some Jews from Iconium and I think Antioch came to Lystra and stirred up the crowd against Paul. And they got them so angry that they literally all picked up rocks and started to stone him, and they literally, and they left him for dead. And like I said, the Jews were pretty good at this. They knew how to kill people that way. And yet the Bible tells us that the believers came and came around him. I'm assuming they prayed. It says Paul just got up and went back into the city.

He goes on to say, *"Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;"* Oh, and by the way, this is not the shipwreck we read about at the end of the Book of Acts because this letter was written before that. There was another shipwreck that happened that Paul wasn't aware was in his future at the time of this writing. We know for sure that at least 4 times he was shipwrecked while he was out doing the gospel, the work of the gospel.

He says, *"...a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger* (he just goes on with this list, *in danger*) *from rivers,"* You might think, wow, what's a danger of rivers? Hey, listen, you and I, we drive over a bridge and don't even think about it. Those people had to cross raging rivers, and during the springtime of the year when they were swollen with melting, and whatever all else, it was a very, very dangerous thing to do.

He says, *"danger from robbers, danger from my (his) own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, (he goes on) danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, (he says) there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."* In other words, Paul says I carry the hearts and whatever of all the people.

Again, Paul is laying out all of these things as almost like a resume and saying, this is how I identify myself in Christ. This is what identifies a believer's true devotion.

You understand identification. Some of you have uniforms that you wear when you go to work. And because you're maybe in some kind of law enforcement or maybe you're a guard at the prison or something like that. And you put on a uniform because it immediately identifies you for who you are. We understand uniforms, we understand identification.

I usually, on Sunday in the afternoon put on my Minnesota Viking shirt, and sometime in the afternoon I take it off. Feeling very bad about it and saying I will never put it on again. You might say, why are you a Minnesota Viking fan? I was born in Minnesota, that's the only reason. It's beside the point. You understand, so we all understand identification.

Do you understand? What Paul is saying here about all these things that have happened to him is that this is what identifies me as a believer in Christ? And the reason he believed that is because Jesus said these are the things that would happen to believers. Let me show you from the Gospel of John, chapter 15. It goes like this. Jesus speaking here,

John 15:18-21 (ESV)

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

“If the world hates you, (just) know that it has hated me before it hated you. (okay? And then He says, listen,) If you were of the world, the world would (embrace you) love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (He says,) Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, (hey,) they will also persecute you. (by the same token) If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

In other words, they don't know God. They don't know Me, and they don't know My Word, and they're not going to accept you.

Notice here what Jesus says in His passage. *"I chose you."* *"I chose you out of the world."* That's why the world hates you because you don't belong. You're an outsider. You're an alien. You're a stranger. Actually, those are words Peter uses to describe us. Did you know that?

And that's something that we just constantly have to remind ourselves of so that we don't lose perspective. This identification of which Paul speaks here in 1 Corinthians, we read it and we're like... And please understand, this is like the excess. I have never experienced anything close to what Paul went through because of his identification with Christ. But it still remains that his identification is normal.

Frankly, if we've never experienced any persecution, that's not normal. Okay? Because we have been chosen out of the world, and because of that, the world doesn't like who we are. We're not to look at this sort of a thing and just go, wow, what in the world is going on here? Right?

That's exactly what... When Peter wrote his first letter, he was writing to Christians who were under very difficult circumstances as it relates to the persecution they were receiving for their faith. Let me show you what he said. He said,

1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, (look at this) as though something strange were happening to you.

It's not strange, it's normal. It's part of your identification with Jesus. And do you know, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to identify with Him throughout our entire lives. One of the first things we do when we get saved is we undergo water baptism. What is water baptism? It's identification. You're identifying with Christ.

He came to identify with you as a sinful person. Not being a sinful person, but He identified with you when He underwent His water baptism. Remember? He came to John at the waters of the Jordan and John said, what are you doing here? I need to be baptized by you. It's okay. Just, let's do this. What was Jesus doing? Identifying with us. Came to identify with us as sinners.

We come to Jesus, we accept what He did for us on the cross. What's one of the first things we ought to be doing? Identifying with Him in the waters of baptism. How does that identify with Christ? Well, it's a dramatization. It's a nonverbal dramatization.

We get people in the tank and we lay them back in the water. That signifies death. And then when they're in the water, that signifies burial. And then we bring them up out of the water and that signifies resurrection. They're identifying with Jesus.

It happens at the very beginning, but it doesn't end there, you see. It goes on and on and at work and at home. Wherever you may be, we identify. Just like you're wearing a uniform with a badge that says law enforcement or something like that. In your case you're putting on Christ and you're identifying with Christ, right?

And people recognize you as being in Christ, and that's why they don't like you because you're in Christ. This is the identification that is part and parcel of our salvation. That's why what these guys in Corinth were doing was so heinous to Paul, because he was like, they're boasting in things that don't identify them with Christ. They're boasting in things that identify them with the world. Right? We're Jews, yeah! That's a worldly carnal sort of a thing that has to do with human ethnicity and nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

We identify in the kingdom, you see, that's the point of this whole thing. And that's why Paul started this method of discussion. You want to boast? We'll boast. But he had a goal to lead them to this conclusion. If we're going to boast, let's boast in the things that identify us with Christ. Because those things are of Christ. Again, the marks on my body are the marks of Jesus.

He ends here saying, *"Who is weak, and I am not weak? (verse 29) Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?"* He's just basically saying, I feel what goes on within the church, I understand and empathize.

And so he ends here in verse 30 by saying, *"If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness."* Because that's my identification with Christ.

And then he ends by telling this interesting sort of a story in verse 32. He says, he reminds them that when he was in *"...Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city,"* because they wanted to capture Paul. But he goes on to explain that they *"let (him) down in a basket through a window in the wall and (he) escaped..."* And you read this, and you're like, why did you

say that? Why did you include that story? Because it's like kind of weird for one thing.

Honestly, this is an event, or this is a something that would probably be more shameful than anything else to most people. I had to be let down from a window in a basket like a puppy. It's really not something that you're probably going to brag about. Yeah, one time they lowered me down in a basket. It's like, aren't I something? Not. You see what I'm saying?

That's the whole point. Paul wants to show the Corinthians that would otherwise be an embarrassment to the world and the things they boast in and about their strength, and this, and that, and the other thing and that might even be something they'd be ridiculed for, is just another proof that we belong to Christ.

Because you see, this whole thing about being embarrassed or humiliated by the world. Do you get it? That's our calling. It's our calling. I mean, that may sound really weird to you, but I'm telling you the truth.

Listen, we serve the Savior who was stripped naked and nailed on a cross. That's humiliating. I know all those wonderful paintings you've seen show Him with some a little loincloth on, but that's not the way the Romans did it. Humiliation was part of the process. They stripped him completely naked, and he hung there for everyone to see.

That's our Savior. That's the one we identify with, so humiliation? You kidding me? It's part of the job. Comes with the calling. There's nothing so worldly or so wonderful that's part of our calling that is going to make you and I feel like the world is our buddy. The world is not your buddy, and they're not going to accept you. Because you serve the humiliated one.

Let me end here this morning by sharing some just amazing words written in the Book of Hebrews, chapter 13. I love this passage. The writer of Hebrews says,

Hebrews 13:11-13 (NIV84)

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so, Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. (we'll talk about why in a moment) And so, (he says) Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the

people holy through his own blood. (look at this last statement) Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

Now listen, one of the things we've learned through our Old Testament studies on Wednesday evening, through various Old Testament books. We just finished Deuteronomy, is that, outside of the camp, or outside of the city gate, if you will, is synonymous with unclean. That's where unclean people went. That's where unclean things took place, like latrines when they were moving through the wilderness.

You think the latrine was in the middle of the camp? No, it was outside the camp. That's where they took their garbage. And, you remember that if somebody touched a dead body, had a running sore, there was a whole laundry list of things that could get you assigned or consigned to life, at least for a period of time, outside the camp. Why? That's where unclean people go. Unclean is tantamount to unacceptable, rejected, okay?

The writer of Hebrews makes this incredible point that although the blood of the animal from the sacrifice is used in that whole process of a sin offering, the body of the animal, that part of the animal that was unclean would be taken outside the city and burned in the dump because that's where you take unclean stuff.

He says, in like manner, Jesus suffered outside the city gates, out where it's unclean. And then he says this. Let's go to Him there. You see the picture he's painting? In the world, following Jesus is not popular and they're going to say it's unclean. They're going to say it's unacceptable.

Guys, you and I are just unacceptable in terms of the world understanding, who and what we are. What are we going to do? The writer of Hebrews says, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to go to Him, outside the city gate. I don't care if it's unclean as far as the world thinks, because that's my Savior. He's the one who died for my sin.

And by the way, when we go to Jesus, it's not unclean. He has made us holy through His shed blood. Even though the world sees it one particular way, you and I know different.

He has made us holy, so let us therefore go to Him, outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore.

It's our identification.